702 military leader (Asan) appointed by the chief.
[857] Each desam had its gymnasium (kalari) into which all retainer-Nayar boys were inducted at the age of seven. Their training in gymnastics and swordsmanship lasted nine years, after which they received their arms at the hand of the king
701 and were accorded the title of Nayar. After this age every able-bodied Nayar man was perpetually in military training until he reached the age of retirement or until he was obliged to succeed to the headship of his matrilineal property-group
[541] and retire to manage its lands. In peacetime, mock fights were organized between Nayars of adjacent villages or of adjacent nads, and jousting was conducted at the court for the entertain-
726 ment of the royal family. In war, the Nayars
[714] fought naked: their arms were the sword, bow, lance and the bow and arrow, though gunpowder was also used, at least by the more important Rajas. Battles between enemy kingdoms appear to have been stylized. Not more than 10,000 men were commonly brought into the field at one time, and severe loss of life was prevented by the employment of Nambudiri emissaries who, if fighting became intense, entered the battle field and arbitrated between its leaders. [32] If however the king or a chief were slain, his subjects must fight to the death until their honour was avenged by the slaughter of a corresponding
721 leader on the enemy side. The aim of such battles appears to have been solely to gain control over the military power of nads of adjacent kingdoms, together with certain payments of tribute by conquered chieftains, and also to gain

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nearer to the sea (Innes, 1908: 270). The temperature varies from 70° to 90° and humidity is always high. Unlike most of the great kingdoms of India, Kerala had no single great river and no extensive, centrally organized irrigation system. Instead, her cultivated crops and lush vegetation depended on the heavy rainfall and numerous small rivers and streams by means of which small-scale irrigation was easily possible to groups of families.

Further, the heavy rainfall, seasonal floods, and hilly terrain made communications difficult until modern times. Before the partial conquest of Kerala by Mysoreans from the northeast in 1766, there were no roads, wheeled vehicles, or pack animals. The kings maintained small cavalry forces only in the coast towns, traveled in palanquins, and employed runners to carry messages to their vassal chiefs. Goods were dragged downstream by elephants, transported in boats, or carried on the backs of men. Armies moved slowly; local nobles sometimes rebelled against their rulers but warfare was abandoned in the heavy southwest monsoon season from May to September. The difficulty of communications and the lack of a centrally organized irrigation system may have been connected with the fact that Kerala had no regular land tax until the 1730's (*ibid.*: 308). Instead, the revenues of her rulers came from tribute in kind supplied by subordinate nobles, and from taxes levied upon overseas trade (Logan, 1951, II: ccxviii; Innes, 1908: 307–308).

In spite of the overseas trade, most of Kerala's villages were traditionally self-sufficient for the basic necessities of life. Quantities of manufactured goods were brought to Kerala's ports from other parts of India for shipment to the Middle East, but indigenous crafts such as weaving, metalwork, pottery, and basketry remained simple and served local needs. Kerala thus had no large urban castes of craftsmen and no indigenous merchant castes, but only immigrant communities of Syrian Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and, later, European merchants and Hindu merchants from other kingdoms of India, all concentrated in the coastal towns. The limited nature of trade and crafts and the comparative self-sufficiency of village life also help to account for the relatively decentralized political structure.

History

Little is known of Kerala until the first century A.D. It then formed part of the kingdom of Chera, whose capital was probably east of the Ghats at Karur on the Kaveri River in the modern Trichinopoly district. Chera, like its companion South Indian kingdoms, Chola and

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lages. The men were often clerks in the palaces. In Cochin, castes two and three were amalgamated and were called Swarupattil Sudra Nayars or "palace servants." 564

Fourth, a caste called Pallichan Nayars, both in Calicut and Cochin. Its members also were vassals in the villages of royalty, chiefs, and of the greater Brahmans. The men were often palanquin bearers as well as soldiers.

Fifth, a caste called Sudra Nayars in Calicut and Illath ("Brahman house") Sudras in Cochin. The members lived in villages owned by Brahman families or on the estates of Brahmanical temples.

The mutual ritual ranking of these five castes seems to have varied in different districts. In some districts they ranked in the order given, and men of a higher caste might marry women of a lower caste; the reverse was in theory forbidden. In other districts the castes seem to have disputed for precedence and not to have regularly intermarried. In most areas the five castes occupied different villages or different sections of large villages, seem to have had little communication in peacetime, and did not normally interdine. In war, however, soldiers of these different castes interdined freely and spent the night in each others' homes. It is possible that sexual restrictions between these castes were also relaxed in war, but this point is uncertain. 564 564 [628] [726]

In each village there were normally some four to seven matrilineages of the appropriate retainer caste. The separate households or property groups within each lineage had the hereditary right, granted by the king, to occupy stretches of garden land and to lease large plots of wet paddy land on long-term tenure from the village landlord. The tenure was called *kānam;* the tenant, *a kānakkaran.* In most villages the men of retainer lineages also owed military service to their landlord, ultimately on behalf of the king. (The military organization is discussed below.) Retainers were called *adiyar,* a word equivalent to "vassals," of their landlord. They participated in his household ceremonies and often waited upon him. Women of retainer lineages could be summoned as serving maids in the landlord's family; men, as bailiffs to collect the landlord's rents and organize the labor of his serfs. 621 613 564 566 471 427

The Temple-Servant Castes In addition to the Nayars, other aristocratic castes often lived in a village. These were the temple servants, nowadays collectively called Ambalavasis. They are relevant to our discussion because they sometimes married Nayar women. The highest of these castes were the Chakkyars (or reciters of Puranic stories) and the Pushpagans (or flower gatherers for temples), which had patrilineal descent systems of the same type as the Nambudiris. They 564 794

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European trade shook the foundations of the caste system in other ways. Ports grew larger, and within them European merchants employed Christian converts, artisans, and runaway serfs. Near the ports, serfs sometimes became slaves, being torn from their ancestral lands and sold or hired for cash.

Nevertheless, until the introduction of steam power in the second half of the nineteenth century, the technology and over-all economy of Kerala did not change very radically. Trade was still limited to surplus crops, luxury goods, and metals. Inland villages remained largely self-sufficient, with the lower castes excluded from cash transactions. Upward mobility was virtually confined to Muslims, Christians, and the Hindu aristocrats above the rank of Nayar retainers. It seems to have been this lack of basic change in the technology which allowed the persistence of a strict, hereditary rank order in villages and, within each homogeneous local caste group, of kinship as the main organizing principle.

War and Law

The traditional period was one of perpetual wars between adjacent kingdoms, interrupted only in the rainy seasons. A royal lineage's strength lay in its monopoly of gunpowder, coinage, and customs dues, its ability to use foreign and Muslim ships for naval warfare, and its control of the royal domains both as a source of produce and of Nayar retainers as soldiers. Through its superior wealth and military power a royal lineage could force feudatory princes and vassal nobles to muster soldiers throughout the kingdom in periods of large-scale war. Each district and each village was classified according to the number of Nayar soldiers it could customarily muster for war. In the Zamorin's kingdom the strength of royal feudatories varied between 18,000 and 1,000 Nayars; of Nayar chiefs, between 5,000 and 100; of village headmen, between about 100 and 25 (Ayyar, 1938: 278). Records of the muster of each feudatory were kept by the Nayar clerks of the palace. The primary duty of each chief was to assemble regularly the soldiers of his district for military exercises at the capital, and in time of war to lead them to battle, with the king himself at their head. Within the district military training was organized on a village basis. This might be done by a Nayar village headman, by the chief himself, or, in Brahman villages, by a Nayar military leader (Asan) who acted for the chief or the king. All Nayar boys of the retainer, village headmen, and chiefly and royal

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castes seem to have received a military training, although some, especially of the Agattu Charna caste, later became clerks (Dames, 1921: 18–19; A. Gray, 1887, I: 412–413).

The Nayars' traditional arms were the sword, shield, lance, and the bow and arrow, although gunpowder came into increasing use after the Portuguese arrived. Before 1500 battles were highly stylized (cf. C. A. Menon, 1911: 56; Ayyar, 1938: 118, 171). Not more than 10,000 were commonly brought into the field at one time. Severe loss of life was prevented by the employment of Brahman emissaries who, if fighting became intense, might enter the field and arbitrate between the leaders. If, however, the king or a chief were slain, his personal vassals had to fight to the death or until their honor was avenged by the slaughter of a corresponding leader on the enemy side (Logan, 1951, I: 138).

Later, with the introduction of cannon and fortresses by the Europeans, battles became more frequent and devastating. The Zamorin mustered a total force of between 50,000 and 60,000 at various times in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries against the ruler of Cochin (Ayyar, 1938: 169, 182). The kings had to rely increasingly on paying their soldiers in cash rather than on sporadic feudal levies. Permanent conquest and the control of rich lands also became a more urgent aim of the kings as the overseas trade expanded. But the Nayar techniques of fighting and their code of honor persisted until British times.

Within each kingdom, law was administered at several levels. Each local caste group had its own periodic assembly of household heads to judge crimes (which were also sins) against the caste's religious laws. These included wrongful interdining and sexual relations with members of other castes. The chief punishments were fines for the upkeep of the caste shrine and temporary ostracism. Grave offenders were excommunicated with the consent of the chief. They then became the property of either king or chief and were sold as slaves to foreign traders. In the larger castes such as Tiyyars or Pulayas the local caste group was often contained within the village. The smaller castes of village servants each had their own assemblies extending over a group of adjacent villages.

Among retainer Nayars the local caste group might comprise the Nayars of one caste within one village, within a section of a large village, or within a group of two to four adjacent small villages. This area was called a *tara* in the Calicut kingdom and a *kara* in Cochin; we shall call it a neighborhood. Its assembly was called a *tara-kūttam*

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613 in Malayalam and some became famous poets during the sixteenth
868 and later centuries. A Nayar received his arms from his feudal lord
[212] —a village headman, a district chief, or a prince—at the age of sixteen. From this time until, perhaps, late middle age, he seems to have
[702] spent periods of each year away from his village attending military
[726] exercises in the larger towns or fighting in the continual wars against the North Malabar chiefdoms, Walluvanad, or Palghat, or between Cochin and Calicut themselves. Evidently Nayars also spent long periods in their villages, at least in the monsoon seasons, for they policed the villages, arranged village festivals, were bailiffs on the landlord's domain, and paid regular visits to local wives. Nayar youths were also obliged to attend with their seniors and fulfill ceremonial obligations
[182] at the life-crisis rites of the landlord family. The rites were of course
[439] conducted in a grand manner and served as a focus for the collection and redistribution of perishable goods throughout the village.

613 Nayar youths also did some cultivation of vegetables and spices in
868 the gardens of their taravāds. Every youth received a rigorous train-
241 ing in cultivation methods, land management, the keeping of accounts, and the construction of houses, either directly from his kāranavan or, more usually, from the brothers of his own mother. However, there was no clear-cut allocation of differential authority and economic roles among the junior men of a taravād in this area. This was evidently not necessary because the bulk of the work was done by tenants and serfs, whose management could be most easily controlled by a single experienced man. It was enough that a young Nayar should learn *how* to manage and to cultivate so that he might one day replace his kāranavan. Their military duties were obviously the important ones for junior
[701] Nayars. It is unfortunate that we know next to nothing about how they were organized in the army, or even if they fought in lineage groups under the leadership of their mothers' brothers. All we know is that they were for the most part recruited in lineages, with the members of one lineage serving the same feudal lord.

613 The division of labor between the sexes was less rigid than in most
462 Hindu castes, but was well demarcated in daily life. Girls played with boys, attended the village school, and even received training in the
[588] gymnasium, until they underwent the tāli rite, usually at about the age of eleven. After this they were segregated from the men of their lineage and concentrated their time on domestic tasks. For most purposes the group of matrilineally related women formed a single work unit under the informal authority of the oldest (or oldest competent) woman. She gave out produce for cooking and allotted to each woman

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took place in areas and periods where one trading power was in the ascendant and wished to support a strong ruler with taxes, arms, and shipping, and through him to gain a monopoly of the pepper trade. Such maneuvers went on continually in the Cochin lineage during the period of European trade. In the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century the Cochin lineage disintegrated into five property groups. The Zamorins to the north, who were expanding with Arab aid, supported the Mutta ("Elder") branch, installed its head as king, and made him feudatory to Calicut. When the Portuguese arrived in 1500 they took up the cause of the Elaya ("Younger") branch, installed them as kings, and ousted the Elder branch and the Zamorin. By 1658 the Younger branch was dying out, as were the three other branches, and only the Elder branch had members available for adoption. Instead of allowing the king to adopt from the Elder branch as they should by custom have done, the Portuguese forced him to adopt from an unrelated lineage, the Rajas of Bettem, who ruled between Cochin and Calicut and who had just defected to the side of Cochin. The Elder branch then sought the help of the Zamorin and the Dutch, and defeated the Cochin Raja and the Portuguese in the war of 1600. The Dutch ousted the Portuguese from Cochin port and installed the Elder branch as their protégés on the throne. Despite such machinations, the Cochin kingdom never became permanently *divided* between branches of the royal lineage, because the office of kingship, supported by one or another merchant power, retained sufficient funds, equipment, and men to restore control over the whole.

The Zamorin's lineage was unusual in that from at least the thirteenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries it apparently did not greatly expand in numbers or divide into separate property groups. Indeed it several times almost died out and in 1705 had to adopt from the Nileswaram lineage, an offshoot of Kolattiri. There were therefore no dynastic wars in Calicut. Even had there been, however, it is safe to say that they would always have culminated in the supremacy of one branch and not in division of the kingdom. This was because throughout the period the Calicut port remained great. With the help of one trading power after another the kingship remained strong and, except for border losses, was able to maintain central judicial control and a system of differentiated political offices within the heart of the kingdom.

Within the Calicut kingdom, which was the strongest until the mid-eighteenth century, dynastic disputes among the district chiefs were usually settled by the king. Succession to district chiefship and to vil-

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634 613 635 622 726 succession to district chiefship and to vil-
lage headships had to be ratified by the king and he could if necessary dispossess disaffected branches and exclude them from office. This was true in the heart of the kingdom. Between Calicut and Cochin, the Zamorins' perpetual enemy, lay several small chiefdoms ruled by formerly independent Kshattriya lineages owing only a tenuous allegiance to one or the other side. In the perennial wars between Calicut and Cochin disaffected branches of these lineages frequently changed sides.

622 635 634 613 Village headmen's lineages, again, had their successions confirmed by the chief or king to whom they owed immediate allegiance. When a property group divided into segments, the tendency seems to have been for the branch having the senior member to retain the ancestral house, the office, and most of the village domain. The king or chief sometimes installed a discarded branch of such a lineage in a vacant office elsewhere, if the office-bearng lineage of that village had died out. His power to do this rested on the fact that an office-bearing lineage which was dying out could not adopt without the consent of the officer of next higher rank. Lopped branches of village headmen's lineages which lost their domains and office seem to have reverted in time to the caste rank of retainer Nayars.

613 554 In most of the royal lineages and many of the chiefly lineages there existed the institution of *sthānams*. These were titles carrying separate estates and sometimes subordinate political offices for the men next in seniority to the ruler, irrespective of branch. The Zamorin's lineage had five sthānams. The first was the Zamorin who had palaces at Calicut and Ponnani. Second came a *sthāni* (title holder) who ruled as chief of Nedunganad, a large chiefdom near the southern boundary whose former ruler had been conquered and executed. The third sthāni regularly patrolled the southern frontier with an army. The fourth and fifth had no political offices but lived on separate estates. The rest of the lineage occupied one or more palaces in Calicut. When a sthāni died, those next below him in age rank all moved up one place. The ruling lineages of Kdattunad, Walluvanad, and Palghat each had five sthānis and many of the lesser chiefs had two or three. Cochin had no sthānis other than the king, but originally the eldest male of the lineage retired into celibacy while the second ruled as king. When the Portuguese came they abolished this rule and installed the king themselves. [648]

[182] When a ruling lineage was financially and militarily strong, sthānams strengthened its rule and helped it to cohere for a longer time than it might otherwise have done. They lifted the senior men out of their

9:Iyer E-4, 5 (ca. 1902-1906) 1912
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persuaded themselves, that no nation could handle it with such skill and dexterity.[1] Such trained young men became the guards of some king or lord, and so faithful and obedient were they, that they had no hesitation to die for him when required. They were the greatest and worst enemies of the Portuguese, and did a great deal of mischief to them by sea. Some of them had a naked rapier or cutlass in their right hand and a great target in their left, made of light wood, some again were armed with bows and venomous arrows upon their shoulders; and while moving about, they made a great noise by knocking the hilt of the rapier against the target in order that they might be heard. Others carried long pikes, some pecus with the match readily lighted, and had the best locks that could be found in all Europe. They knew how to use them, and the Portuguese had no advantage over them. Wherever they went, they carried their arms both by day and night.[2]

"They went into battle almost naked, threw javelin with equal address backward and forward, and drew the bow with such skill that their second shaft often split the first. Their extraordinary agility made them the terror of every combat in forest or jungle. On the smallest provocation they prepared themselves for death, and having done so, one would hold his ground against a hundred. Those attached to the person of the prince made it a point of honour not to survive him."[3]

Their military dress and mode of fighting.

"The military dress of the Nayar is a pair of short drawers and his peculiar weapon is an instrument with a thin but very broad blade hooked towards the edge like a bill-hook or gardener's knife, and about the length of a Roman sword. The hooked instrument, the inseparable companion of the Nayar whenever he quits his dwelling on business, pleasure or for war, has no scabbard, and is usually grasped by the right hand as an ornamental appendage during the time of peace and used for destruction in war. When the Nayar employs his 'musquet' or his bow, the weapon already described is fixed in an instant by means of a catch in the waist belt, with the flat part of the blade diagonally across his back; and it can be

1. Johnstone in his relations of the most famous kingdom in the world, 1611.

2. Voyages of Linschoten to the East Indies,

3. Graul Reise nach Ost Indien,

9:Iyer E-4, 5 (ca. 1902-1906)1912
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disengaged as quickly whenever he drops his 'musquet' in the wood or slings it across his shoulders for the purpose of rushing to close encounter with this terrible instrument." [1]

Cavalry was unknown; there was only infantry. The soldiers wore a silk cloth wound round the head and carried swords, shields, lances and bows. The king had an umbrella formed of the leaves of a tree and fixed on to the end of a cane, for protection from the sun. There was no standard. When they were in battle, and one army was at a distance from the other, two ranges of a cross-bow, the king would ask the Brahmans to go to the camp of the enemy and tell the knights to let one hundred of his men fight with the same number on his side, when both the parties would go to the central space to do so. The fighting continued even for three days, when blows were given on the head and at the legs. After the death of some men on either side, the survivors were directed to return to their camps. If any more fighting was desired, the same course was adopted. Sometimes the king rode on an elephant, and sometimes the Nayars carried him. The pay of a soldier was four carlini a month, and in time of war half a ducat.

The Nayars whom the king received in his service were never dismissed, however old they might be. They received their pay and rations, and the king granted favours to whosoever had served him well. If, however, they were left unpaid for some years, some four or five hundred of the aggrieved would rise up and go in a body to the palace, and send word to the king that they would go away dismissed, because he did not give them food. The king would then beg them to have patience, pay them at once either the whole amount due to them or a part of it with a promise to pay the balance at an early date. The king generally satisfied them, considering it a disgrace that they should go away to serve under another ruler. Even in times of war they were not at liberty to touch any peasant, or eat and drink with him in his house without penalty. The king was bound to support the mother and family of any soldier who died in war. He also treated, at his own expense, any soldier who was wounded in battle. [2]

1. Abbe Dubois People of India.
2. A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar, page 130-131, Duarte Barbosa.

13;Thurston & Rangachari E-4, 5 (no date) 1909
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went on to observe: 'These lines, and especially the two last, contain a good description of a Nayr, who walks along, holding up his naked sword with the same kind of unconcern as travellers in other countries carry in their hands a cane or walking staff. I have observed others of them have it fastened to their back, the hilt being stuck in their waist band, and the blade rising up and glittering between their shoulders' (Asiatic Researches, V. 10, 18). M. Mahé de la Bourdonnais, who had some experience of their fighting qualities in the field, thus described them: 'Les Nairs sont de grands hommes basanés, légers, et vigoureux: Ils n'ont pas d'autre profession que celle des armes, et seraient de fort bons soldats, s'ils étiaent disciplinés: mais ils combattent sans ordre, ils prennent la fuite dès qu'on les serre de près avec quelque supèriorité; pourtant, s'ils se voient pressés avec vigueur et qu'ils se croient en danger, ils reviennent à la charge, et ne se rendent jamais' (M. Esquer, Essai sur les Castes dans l'Inde, page 181). Finally, the only British General of any note—Sir Hector Munro—who had ever to face the Nāyars in the field, thus wrote of their modes of fighting:—

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'One may as well look for a needle in a Bottle of Hay as any of them in the daytime, they being lurking behind sand banks and bushes, except when we are marching towards the Fort, and then they appear like bees out in the month of June.' 'Besides which,' he continued, 'they point their guns well, and fire them well also' (Tellicherry Factory Diary, March, 1761). They were, in short, brave light troops, excellent in skirmishing, but their organization into small bodies with discordant interests unfitted them to repel any serious invasion by an enemy even moderately well organised. Among other strange Malayāli customs, Sheikh

13:Thurston & Rangachari E-4, 5 (no date) 1909
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Zin-ud-din * noticed the fact that, if a chieftain was slain, his followers attacked and obstinately persevered in ravaging the slayer's country, and killing his people till their vengeance was satisfied. This custom is doubtless that which was described so long ago as in the ninth century A.D. by two Muhammadans, whose work was translated by Renaudot (Lond., 1733). 'There are kings who, upon their accession, observe the following ceremony. A quantity of cooked rice was spread before the king, and some three or four hundred persons came of their own accord, and received each a small quantity of rice from the king's own hands after he himself had eaten some. By eating of this rice they all engage themselves to burn themselves on the day the king dies or is slain, and they punctually fulfil their promise.' Men, who devoted themselves to certain death on great occasions, were termed Amoucos by the Portuguese; and Barbosa, one of the Portuguese writers, alluded to the practice as prevalent among the Nāyars. Purchas has also the following:—'The king of Cochin hath a great number of Gentlemen, which he calleth Amocchi, and some are called Nairi: these two sorts of men esteem not their lives anything, so that it may be for the honour of the king.' The proper Malayālam term for such men was Chāver, literally those who took up, or devoted themselves to death. It was a custom of the Nāyars, which was readily adopted by the Māppillas, who also at times—as at the great Mahāmakkam, twelfth year feast, at Tirunāvāyi †—devoted themselves to death in the

* The author of Tahafat-ul-Mujahidin or hints for persons seeking the way to God, as it is frequently translated, or more literally an offering to warriors who shall fight in defence of religion against infidels. Translated by Rowlandson. London, 1833.

† See Manual of the Malabar district, 164, sq., and Fawcett, Madras Museum Bull., III, 3, 1901.